

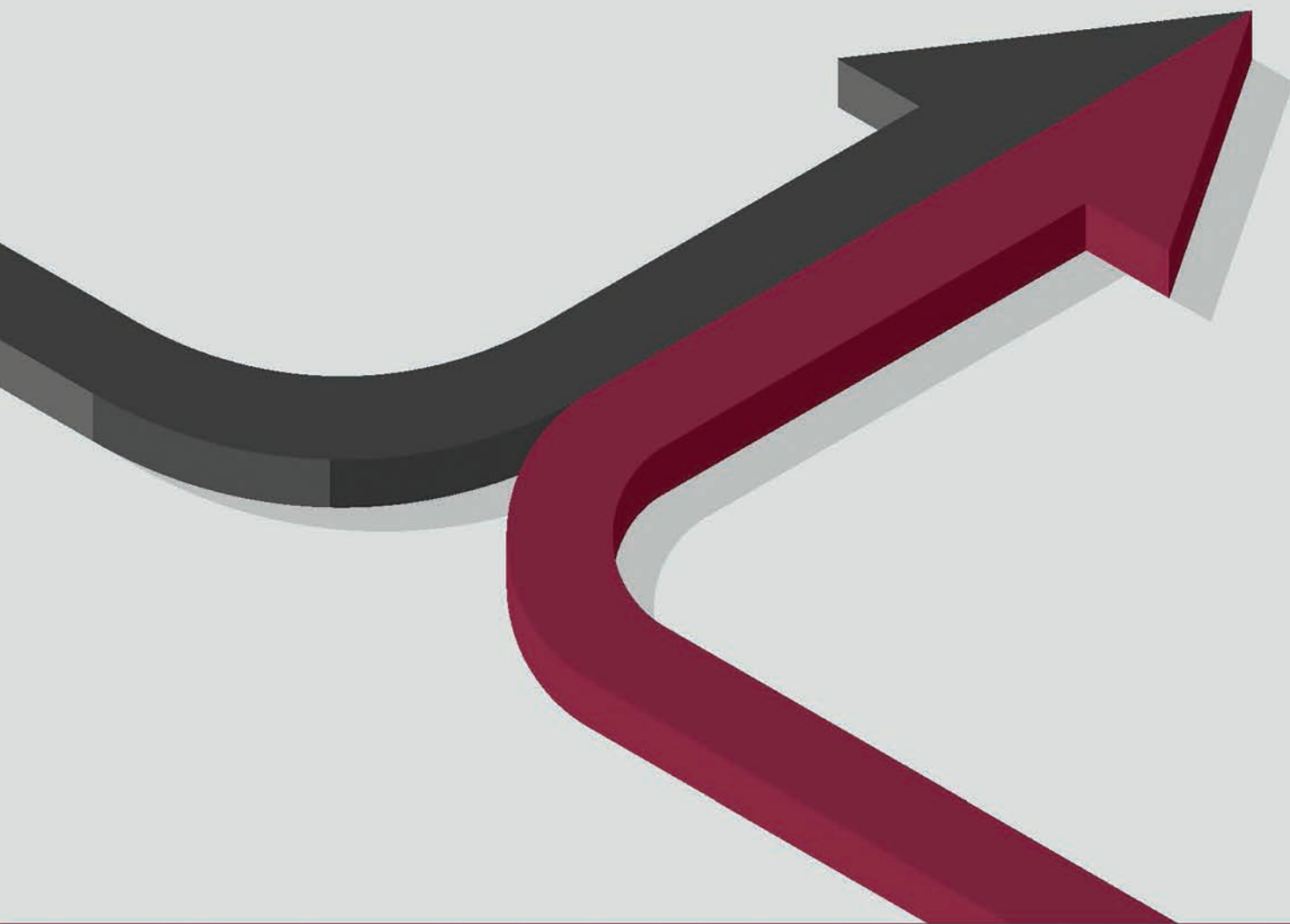


# WISCONSIN Counties

MARCH 2025

## WISCONSIN'S GROUNDWATER **A Buried Treasure**

**ALSO:** Adams County Homestead Credit Program | Opioid Litigation Update



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# WISCONSIN Counties

MARCH 2025 | Volume 89, Number 3



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## From the President

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Mark D. O'Connell

/ President & CEO

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# Staying Focused on Our Mission in a Time of Change

“The only constant in life is change.” This timeless, ancient Greek wisdom is as relevant today as it has ever been.

In this era of swift political change, it is essential to stay focused on our core mission and actively engage with state and national developments that affect counties' ability to govern effectively.

The work of counties touches the lives of every citizen, young and old, urban and rural.

From maintaining roads and supporting the legal system to delivering health and human services, administering elections, and fostering economic development, county government serves as the backbone of our state.

Our responsibilities are extensive, yet the mission is clear: to make our communities the best places to live, work and play.

With the 2025-2026 state legislative session underway and a new federal administration in place, the WCA has been very busy, working diligently to navigate the new complexities. The WCA Government Affairs team is engaging with state legislators and communicating with our federal delegation to advance the association's agenda and provide input on proposed changes.

In early March, we will join county officials from across the state and nation at the National Association of Counties Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., to

meet with congressional representatives.

The WCA remains steadfast in its work, advocating on behalf of our members and ensuring that county interests remain front of mind. However, our message is most powerful when backed by engaged and informed local leaders.

Whether you write an email or call a legislator to explain the impact of a proposed policy, pass a resolution urging action, testify before a committee, or raise local awareness about an important issue, your advocacy truly makes a difference.

Wisconsin's counties have a proud tradition of strong leadership and effective governance. In the face of challenges, you find ways to adapt and serve your communities with dedication and integrity. We must remain focused on the mission of counties, stay informed about state and national developments, and advocate tirelessly for our residents.

The WCA is proud to walk alongside you on this journey and remains committed to providing the resources and support necessary to help you navigate these uncertain times. From individual meetings to monthly webinars and weekly County Leadership Meetings, we are committed to engaging with policymakers at every level. Together, we can ensure that counties remain a powerful force for positive change. ■

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**Stay connected.**

Visit [wicounties.org](https://wicounties.org) to access resources and learn about events.





## Forward Analytics Releases First “Spotlight” Publication

The “Spotlight” is a new research publication for WCA members. Created by Forward Analytics, the research arm of the WCA, the Spotlight publication is intended to provide valuable data to county officials and others in the governmental and legislative arenas.

“Spotlight is the result of many internal discussions about the variety of interesting data that crosses our desks,” said Dale Knapp, director of Forward Analytics. “This data, while compelling, doesn’t always constitute a full study. So, we created the Spotlight to share relevant information in a brief format on a regular basis.”

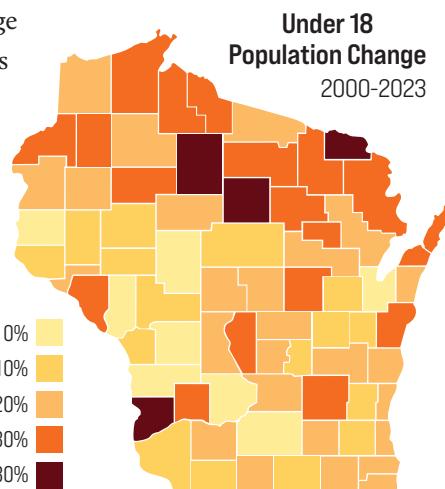
Forward Analytics released the first Spotlight in January.

“A Declining Resource,” a two-page Spotlight research piece, examines the 23-year decline in Wisconsin’s youth population. It explores the factors behind the decline and its implications for K-12 and post-secondary schools and the state’s future workforce.

Spotlights are distributed by email to WCA members and available online at [forward-analytics.net](http://forward-analytics.net).

Visit the website to access the January report and a detailed, interactive map showing the change in the under-18 population from 2000 to 2023, with data for each county. □

*If you have questions or feedback, contact Knapp at [knapp@wicounties.org](mailto:knapp@wicounties.org) or Forward Analytics Deputy Director Kevin Dospoy at [dospoy@wicounties.org](mailto:dospoy@wicounties.org).*



## WISCONSIN Counties

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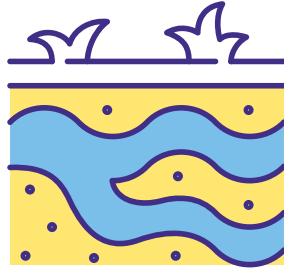
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Photo: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources





# Wisconsin's Groundwater A Buried Treasure

*By WI Land+Water*

Wisconsin is fortunate to have abundant water resources, with groundwater playing a critical role in supporting industry, recreation and drinking water needs. The state holds an estimated 1.2 quadrillion gallons of groundwater, which is enough to cover Wisconsin in 100 feet of water.

Our temperate climate typically provides sufficient precipitation to recharge most aquifers, sparing us from the widespread groundwater depletion challenges seen in western states.

The relationship between surface water and groundwater — nature's hidden reservoir — is deeply interconnected. Surface water relies on groundwater discharge while groundwater quality and quantity are influenced by land use and surface water inputs. Differences in geology across the state, combined with varying land use and human activity, mean that this precious resource is not available in the same quantity and quality for everyone as water and contaminant levels fluctuate.

In regions with shallow crystalline bedrock, such as

Clark, Taylor, and western Marathon counties, the bedrock has limited capacity to store water, resulting in low aquifer output and restricted groundwater supply.

Carbonate rock formations cover roughly one-third of the state. Over millennia, these have dissolved to form karst landscapes, as seen in Kewaunee and Door counties, where rapid contaminant transport can compromise drinking water.

Glacial deposits across much of the state create diverse groundwater conditions. In areas like Adams and Waushara counties, sandy and gravelly deposits provide high aquifer yields but are especially vulnerable to contamination.

How we use the land above these geologic formations directly impacts groundwater quality. Responsible land management is essential to protecting this buried treasure.

Federal, state and local partners are working together to monitor and manage our water resources to mitigate the contaminants. These efforts strive to ensure that groundwater remains abundant and clean, supporting the economy, providing safe drinking water, and preserving recreation and scenic beauty for future generations. ■



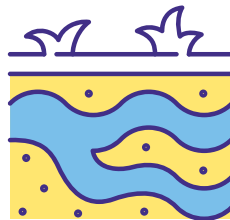
Photo: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

# Protect Wisconsin's Groundwater

## How Counties Can Help

*Elaine Meier, Federal Programs Outreach Coordinator, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
Drinking Water and Groundwater Program*

**A**n adequate supply of clean, healthy groundwater is central to Wisconsin's health, security and economic vitality. More than 70% of Wisconsin residents depend on groundwater for drinking and industries across the state rely on it.



But how healthy is Wisconsin's groundwater, and what threatens it?

### ► Groundwater contaminants

Nitrate occurs naturally in air, water and soil. However, nitrate levels exceeding 10 milligrams per liter (mg/L) in drinking water threaten human health, particularly for infants and during a pregnancy. Elevated nitrate levels have also been linked to serious diseases such as thyroid disorders and cancer.

Nitrate, the state's most widespread groundwater

contaminant, poses ongoing challenges.

Agricultural activities, such as spreading manure, applying fertilizer and failing to prevent animal waste runoff, are the primary causes of nitrate contamination. Faulty septic systems and other human activity can also contribute. In some

heavily farmed areas of Wisconsin, 20-30% of private well samples have exceeded the 10 mg/L threshold.

In addition to existing challenges, emerging contaminants in groundwater create more problems for safe drinking water. Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of human-made chemicals that have been in the news headlines lately. While these substances have been used in industry and consumer products worldwide since the 1940s, their health hazards have only recently come under scrutiny as scientific research findings have become available.

Also known as "forever chemicals," PFAS do not easily

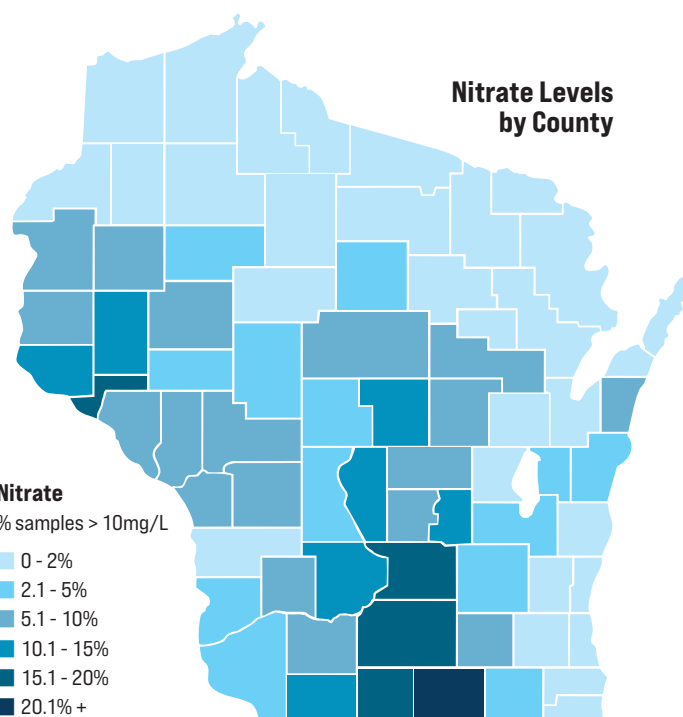


break down in the environment and have been known to accumulate in freshwater aquatic ecosystems and humans. Exposure to high levels of PFAS can harm human health. In Wisconsin, one or more PFAS compounds have been detected in 71% of private potable wells.

Pesticides are another class of emerging contaminants. In Wisconsin, approximately 43% of private drinking water wells are estimated to have detectable levels of one or more pesticides.

### ► What can be done to combat groundwater contamination?

- Implement land-use strategies that reduce the leaching of nitrate and other contaminants, such as pesticides.
- Advocate for policies that protect groundwater. Collaboration and information sharing are key for state agencies, counties and other Wisconsin groups concerned about groundwater management and use, responsible development, and groundwater protection. The interagency Groundwater Coordinating Council facilitates and provides advice on groundwater policy and management.
- Contact your municipality for water-quality data or use the Department of Natural Resources Groundwater Retrieval Network webpage. The department requires annual contaminant testing for all public water systems across Wisconsin. Local municipalities often collect this information and send it to residents. Remember, private wells are not regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act and are not part of a public water system.



Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
Adapted from a Groundwater Coordinating Council report

- Encourage private well owners to regularly test for the three most common contaminants in Wisconsin well water — bacteria, nitrate and arsenic. It's the owner's responsibility to make sure their drinking water is safe.
- Support and promote funding for testing private wells. Only one-third of private well owners have tested their water for nitrate.
- Properly dispose of hazardous waste, such as pharmaceuticals, pool chemicals, motor oil and other materials, that could contaminate aquifers providing drinking water.

*Continued on page 11*

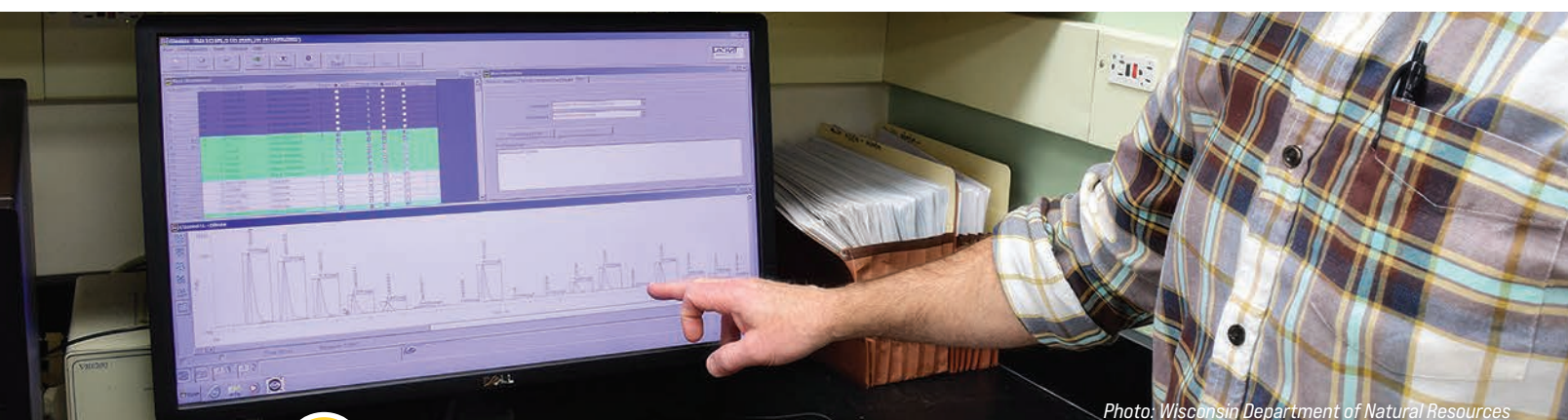


Photo: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources



## RELATED STATE AGENCY ONLINE RESOURCES

**PFAS Health Effects:** [dhs.wisconsin.gov/chemical/pfas.htm](https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/chemical/pfas.htm)

**Drinking Water:** [dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/DrinkingWater](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/DrinkingWater)

**Drinking Water Data:** [dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/DrinkingWater/QualityData.html](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/DrinkingWater/QualityData.html)

**Groundwater Coordinating Council:** [bit.ly/WI-GCC](https://bit.ly/WI-GCC)

**Groundwater Retrieval Network:** [apps.dnr.wi.gov/grnext/SampleHistory/Search](https://apps.dnr.wi.gov/grnext/SampleHistory/Search)

**Hazardous Household Waste:** [dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Waste/HouseholdHW.html](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Waste/HouseholdHW.html)



Photo: Abbotsford School District

## Working to Lower Nitrate Levels: A LOCAL STORY

**Abbotsford, a small Wisconsin community in Clark and Marathon counties with a population of 2,500, relies on 24 relatively low-capacity public wells to provide safe drinking water.**

In 2024, the DNR's Source Water Protection Team identified three city wells with rising nitrate levels located next to the Abbotsford School District's agriculture field. The Source Water Protection Team regularly reviews statewide public water quality data to help communities identify potential sources of groundwater contamination and prevent contaminant levels from increasing in water supply wells.

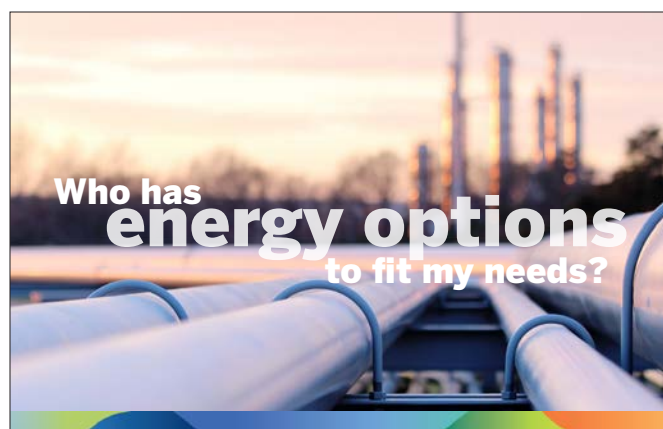
With information about Abbotsford's well water quality, the city and school district collaborated with the Wisconsin Rural Water Association and the Thriving Earth Exchange to explore alternative land uses that balance financial needs with environmental stewardship.

The group developed ideas to transition the school district's agriculture field to a new purpose that would generate alternative revenue and reduce the nitrate contamination.

Abbotsford students now are actively involved in enhancing the site's ecological value by planting native vegetation and trees. With support from the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey (WGNHS), they are also involved in groundwater monitoring efforts. This valuable opportunity allows students to learn about local geology and groundwater quality.

The three municipal wells with high nitrate levels are being monitored monthly to assess the effectiveness of the land-use conversion alternatives. To better understand local hydrologic conditions, the DNR partnered with the WGNHS to install four monitoring wells and collect soil samples 50 feet below the surface. Data collected from the municipal and monitoring wells will help future land management decisions in Abbotsford and other communities facing similar challenges.

The DNR, in partnership with a wide network of collaborators, including the Wisconsin Rural Water Association and the WGNHS, offers funding, outreach and technical support for various initiatives to safeguard drinking water across the state. These projects include field studies to evaluate nutrient management programs, conservation practices, and practical applications like the Abbotsford collaboration, which aims to lower nitrate levels in public water supplies. □



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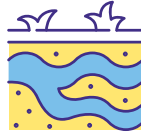
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Continued from page 9

The DNR's Household Hazardous Waste webpage provides easy-to-find resources, including a disposal guide and a link to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Safer Choice list for consumers and businesses. In addition, the National Ground Water Association provides tips for safeguarding and conserving groundwater, including chemical reduction, nontoxic alternatives, consumption reduction and sustainability ideas. Every effort made by individuals or groups makes a difference, so start now.

It's important to remember that contaminants are not the only threat to Wisconsin's precious groundwater. Some areas of the state are water-stressed, meaning they have a limited groundwater supply due to aquifers with low water capacity. Factors that impact water-stressed areas include water withdrawals, variable climate (e.g., drought and precipitation



events), and water conservation and efficiency measures. The DNR works with and monitors water withdrawers, approves high-capacity wells, provides water conservation tips and recommends efficiency practices.

The department continues its commitment to protecting groundwater through Chapters NR 140 and 160 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code, which address groundwater quality and protection standards. The standards aim to minimize polluting substances in groundwater to protect public health and the environment. Source water protection is the first line of defense against the contamination of drinking water sources. Learn more from the DNR's Drinking Water webpage (see links on page 9), which provides various information, including details on regulations, water supply standards and testing. ■

*Elaine Meier is the federal programs outreach coordinator for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Drinking Water and Groundwater Program.*

**Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey (WGNHS)** has been serving Wisconsin for over 125 years. Part of the Division of Extension at UW-Madison, it provides objective scientific information about the state's geology, mineral resources and water resources. WGNHS researches and maps Wisconsin's geology and shares information through its publications and outreach.

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NRM-15230M3-NX.3 (06/22)





Lab staff from the Center for Watershed Science and Education analyze water samples taken from private wells.

# Hydrogeologic Studies in Bayfield and Burnett Counties

Developing resources for groundwater protection and land use planning

By Deilee Calvert, Communications Manager, UW-Madison Division of Extension

When Bayfield County received a proposal for a concentrated animal feeding operation, groundwater safety was top of mind. “Bayfield County has a long history of protecting our water resources, whether inland lakes, waterways, or Lake Superior shoreland areas,” said Mark Abeles-Allison, Bayfield County administrator.

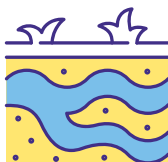
## ► Tools to help with land use decisions

County supervisors realized they needed a better understanding of the hydrogeological system to help them make informed decisions about land use and protecting

their natural resources. They turned to the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey (WGNHS) to create a hydrogeological atlas, which is a comprehensive study of the region that includes visuals and tools.

Abeles-Allison says the atlas, available at [go.wisc.edu/bayfield-atlas](http://go.wisc.edu/bayfield-atlas), is easy to read and helpful in making decisions. “It gives us an immediate visual representation to identify the areas most susceptible to contamination.” The atlas has helped elected officials, resource managers and community members plan for Bayfield County’s future.

As part of a new position created by the Wisconsin State Legislature, Amy Wiersma, a hydrogeologist with WGNHS,





has worked directly with counties since 2023 to develop groundwater resources. Part of her work includes digitizing existing hydrogeological maps so the information available electronically is easily accessible and downloadable. When existing maps are insufficient, Wiersma works with counties to design groundwater studies that update and expand their information.



*Amy Wiersma, a hydrogeologist at the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey, works in Burnett County to collect data on groundwater susceptibility to contaminants.*

### ► Updating previous maps with new data

Land use changes over time, so updating hydrogeological maps to be more detailed and useful is essential. That was Burnett County's goal when they contacted WGNHS.

"It's been 35 years. It's about time for an update," said the outgoing county conservationist Dave Ferris. He was around in the 1990s when the last hydrogeological maps were drawn. Since then, 8,000 new wells have been drilled throughout the county and land use has changed. The incoming county conservationist Emily Moore is leading the charge this time. "Burnett County's groundwater table is super high and susceptible to contamination. We can use those maps to educate on different development

standpoints," said Moore.

Ferris and Moore said groundwater is a high priority for their county board of supervisors. "We've been getting excessively high groundwater, so the seepage lakes have been rising and people's basements have been flooded," said Ferris. At the same time, their office has had more questions about water quality. "In agricultural areas, people ask if their water is safe and will it remain safe if an agricultural operation

moves into the area and spreads manure."

### ► Studies to track water quality

For the past year, the county has worked with Wiersma and the project team at WGNHS to develop a baseline to track water quality moving forward. "We want to say, 'Here's what was going on in 1990 and here's what's going on in 2025,'" said Ferris. "It helps us question if our groundwater is getting worse or if there is an increase in pollutants." Hydrogeological maps alone will not allow them to track water quality, so they are also working with the Center for Watershed Science and Education (CWSE) to test private wells throughout the county.

*Continued on page 14*

## ■ DATA INCLUDED IN A COMPREHENSIVE GROUNDWATER INVENTORY

Groundwater inventories characterize resources by determining groundwater levels, identifying areas where groundwater is most vulnerable to changes in land use, and evaluating groundwater quality. Common terms include:

**Well geo-location:** The creation of GIS maps based on well construction reports to more accurately reflect the correct position of wells on the landscape.

**Geological maps:** The distribution of geologic materials that make up the aquifer supplying water to wells.

**Estimated groundwater recharge:** The amount of precipitation that infiltrates into the ground and reaches the water table. Groundwater is more susceptible to contamination in areas with high recharge.

**Water-table elevation:** The level of groundwater in an aquifer.

**Depth to bedrock:** The distance between the land surface and the top of bedrock.

**Depth to water:** The distance between the land surface and the water table.

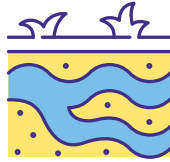
**Groundwater susceptibility to contamination:** The likelihood that contamination from activities at the ground surface will reach the water table. Used for decision-making about land use and drinking water quality.

**Well-water quality sampling:** The process of testing well samples across the county to evaluate the potential impacts of land use, plumbing and geology on groundwater quality.

**“Having a better understanding of the types of rocks and soils that a well is drilled into, both spatially and vertically, is critically important in understanding why water quality varies throughout a county or the state.” —Kevin Masarik, director of CWSE**

*Continued from page 13*

Kevin Masarik, director of CWSE, works with counties regularly to test private wells. He says that several things dictate well water quality. Some things depend on individual households, such as the land use near their well and the plumbing they are using. But understanding the geology is important as well. “The materials in which the water is transported and stored will impart different impurities to people’s well water. Having a better understanding of the types of rocks and soils that a well is drilled into, both spatially and vertically, is critically important in understanding why water quality varies throughout a county or the state,” said Masarik.



people most at risk of contamination are testing their water. When there are limited funds for conservation efforts, mapping and water quality data together can help counties focus those funds.

“This would maybe give you a way to prioritize where those funds should be utilized or would have the most impact,” said Masarik.

“Land use changes all the time with development. And we drink water. We should know what we’re drinking and putting into the earth,” said Moore.

With their new groundwater resources, Bayfield and Burnett counties plan to find out. Contact Amy Wiersma at [amy.wiersma@wisc.edu](mailto:amy.wiersma@wisc.edu) or Kevin Masarik at [kmasarik@uwsp.edu](mailto:kmasarik@uwsp.edu) to learn more. ■

*Deilee Calvert is the communications manager for the UW-Madison Division of Extension.*

### ► Using maps to prioritize resources

For Masarik, a significant advantage of having county-level maps is prioritizing resources. If a county has limited funding for water testing, they’ll want to ensure that the

### Center for Watershed Science and Education

**CWSE works across Wisconsin** to provide groundwater and drinking water quality education targeted toward populations served by rural residential well water systems. Other aspects of their work include understanding the relationship between agricultural land use, water quality, and geologic-related groundwater contaminants, and utilizing CWSE’s well water data to educate the public about significant groundwater quality concerns where they live and work.

CWSE tools help monitor, understand and observe Wisconsin water quality data trends. They are accessible to the public and decision-makers who want to learn more about water quality in their communities.

CWSE is a joint venture of the College of Natural Resources at UW-Stevens Point and the UW-Madison Division of Extension. □

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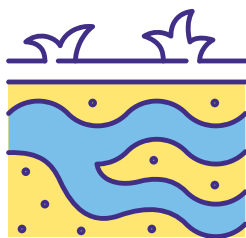
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# Southwest Wisconsin Groundwater Study

## COUNTIES UNITE TO TAKE ACTION

*By Katie Abbott, County Conservationist, Iowa County*

The Southwest Wisconsin Groundwater and Geology Study, launched in 2018, spurred groundwater protection initiatives in Grant, Iowa and Lafayette counties and across the state.

The initial results of nitrate and bacteria testing, which were released in 2019, prompted the state Legislature to form a bipartisan Water Quality Task Force. The task force toured Wisconsin and ultimately proposed 13 bills related to water quality.

Locally, the issues identified in the study spurred new efforts to reduce groundwater contamination in each of the three counties.

The final results of the regional study, released in May 2022, examined the extent of private well contamination, fecal and pathogen contamination, and factors related to contamination in 840 wells tested between November 2018 and March 2020. Of those wells, 15-16% had nitrate-N greater than 10 mg/L, the maximum level considered safe. The contamination was associated with agricultural land, geology and the depth of well casings. Bacteria were detected in 16-34% of wells, with older wells more likely to be contaminated.

Of the wells contaminated by nitrate or bacteria, a random sample of 138 wells was further tested for fecal and pathogen contamination. Human wastewater from

septic systems was detected in 64 wells. Manure from cattle was detected in 33 wells, and manure from pigs in 13 wells. Pathogens were detected in 66 wells and co-occurred in wells with wastewater and manure.

In response, Iowa County allocated funds to a new cost-sharing program to replace pre-1980 septic systems, seal unused wells, replace wells connecting upper and lower aquifers, and protect sinkholes and mineshafts. Additionally, farmers were offered incentives for nitrogen-use efficiency assessments.

“Septic system replacement was the most popular practice,” said Katie Abbott, Iowa County conservationist. “Several landowners said they knew they should replace their systems eventually, and it made sense to do it while funding was available.”

Grant County sponsored a Clean Sweep program to help residents and businesses properly dispose of chemical waste and initiated plans for a farmer-led watershed group.

Well decommissioning, which protects groundwater by filling old well holes that could allow contamination to run from the surface into the aquifer, is popular in all three



*Katie Abbott*



## *“Groundwater remains an important consideration in conservation efforts in southwest Wisconsin.”*

— Erica Sauer, Lafayette County conservation, planning and zoning manager

counties. Each county funds seven to 10 well decommission projects annually.

The county health departments in Iowa and Lafayette counties established their own well water testing labs to make it easier for landowners to monitor their drinking water. Iowa County began testing for bacteria in-house in November 2023, and sends samples for nitrate, arsenic, and lead to a partner lab for testing. Lafayette County began testing for bacteria in 2019, added nitrate testing in 2023, and sends samples to a partner lab for arsenic and lead testing. In the last year, each county processed 300-400 samples and assisted more than 100 landowners.

Iowa County’s conservation and health departments began partnering for National Groundwater Awareness Week. This joint outreach included a geology talk in March 2024 and will include a PFAS talk and a nitrogen efficiency workshop in March 2025.

“Groundwater remains an important consideration in

conservation efforts in southwest Wisconsin,” said Erica Sauer, Lafayette County conservation, planning and zoning manager. “We are committed to helping farmers and other landowners in protecting our drinking water.”

Researchers from the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey have continued working in the area. Upcoming research will characterize the risk of illness from pathogens in private wells, evaluate well and geological factors related to pathogen contamination, and investigate antibiotic-resistant genes in private wells.

The Southwest Wisconsin Groundwater and Geology Study scientific manuscript will be published soon. The final report and a recording of the public presentation are available online at [bit.ly/SW-WI-Groundwater](https://bit.ly/SW-WI-Groundwater). ■

*Katie Abbott is the county conservationist for Iowa County. She directs Iowa County’s Land Conservation Department, which assists farmers and rural landowners with soil, water and wildlife conservation through technical assistance, cost-sharing, incentive payments and educational programs.*

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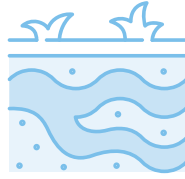


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# Partnership Expands Well Water Testing in Eau Claire County

*By Matt Steinbach, Environmental Sciences Division Manager, Eau Claire City-County Health Department*

**R**ecognizing the importance of safe drinking water for all who use the approximately 10,000 private wells in Eau Claire County, environmental public health and geology researchers at UW-Eau Claire partnered with the city-county health department in 2023 and 2024 to offer free private well water testing for common contaminants, including nitrate, metals and PFAS.

The project was funded by the county's American Rescue Plan Act dollars.

"UW-Eau Claire undergraduate students have been heavily involved in this initiative, learning research methods related to drinking water quality and public communication skills," said Dr. Sarah Vitale, associate professor of geology and environmental science at UW-Eau Claire. "As researchers who care deeply for environmental public health, we're glad to be able to serve the community in such an impactful way."

Before this initiative, PFAS testing in Eau Claire County was extremely limited and often cost-prohibitive. After testing by the partners and the Wisconsin Department of Natural

Resources each revealed PFAS in a small number of private wells, the health department quickly began outreach to expand testing for PFAS.

The health department notified homeowners in the area and offered them additional testing support, such as sampling and shipping to a qualified lab for analysis,

as well as ARPA-funded, free PFAS testing for the closest wells. This testing revealed numerous additional rural drinking water wells impacted by PFAS. Health department staff work to help homeowners understand their test results and, if needed, connect them with resources to improve their drinking water.

"Allocating ARPA funding to testing equipment and services provided a unique opportunity to expand groundwater testing across Eau Claire County," said Lieske Giese, health department director. "These upgrades increased our efficiency and ultimately allowed this partnership to test more wells."

Since many contaminants can't be seen, smelled or tasted, it's important that private well users test their drinking water at least once a year. ■



*Photo credit: Dr. Sarah Vitale, UW-Eau Claire*



# Protecting Door County Groundwater

## A BIG CHALLENGE WITH KARST GEOLOGY

*By Greg Coulthurst, County Conservationist, Door County*

“In wine, there is wisdom, in beer, there is freedom, and in water, there is bacteria!” While this quote is often wrongly attributed to Benjamin Franklin, it is nevertheless a catchy phrase that raises the question of what else is in the water we drink.

Door County’s underlying karst geology (highly fractured dolomitic limestone) is extremely susceptible to groundwater contamination. To compound the issue, the overlying soil is very shallow when compared to other areas of the state. Soil depths for 39% of the land area in Door County are less than 36 inches to bedrock and 22% of the soils are less than 18 inches to bedrock. This thin soil covering is the only filter for the groundwater from daily activities conducted on land surfaces.

Since the early 1940s, numerous groundwater studies and issues with bacterial and nitrate contamination have been documented. Even a decade ago, it was not uncommon for a third of the private wells undergoing testing to be deemed unsafe due to bacteria or high nitrate levels.

In 2015 and 2017, Door and Kewaunee counties lobbied legislators for additional groundwater protection standards for the spreading of animal manure on thin soils over bedrock. In response, new “Silurian bedrock performance standards” were added to Chapter NR 151 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code. Both counties adopted local ordinances in 2018 in alignment with the new standards.

The following year, the Door County Soil and Water Conservation Department partnered with UW-Oshkosh to conduct a program to monitor the water quality in private wells and discern trends. This private well sampling effort is now conducted every spring and fall.

In 2023, the county contracted with GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc. to conduct a four-year emerging contaminant study. This study was initiated to get a better

understanding of the presence or absence of potential contaminants, of which there is very little data. The study will look for microplastics, PFAS, PAHs (polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, which is a class of chemicals found in coal, crude oil, and gasoline and created when certain organic materials are burned), pesticides, personal care products, pharmaceuticals, arsenic, nitrates and bacteria. The results will be available on Door County’s Soil and Water Conservation Department website at [bit.ly/Door-Groundwater](https://bit.ly/Door-Groundwater).

What’s in your water? ■

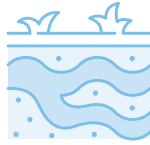
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# Rock County Addresses Nitrates

*By Andrew Baker, Director of Planning and Land Conservation, Rock County*

Since early 2017, Rock County has made a concerted effort to address the high nitrate concentration in its groundwater. A combination of past land use practices, geology and other environmental factors has led to about 25% of wells tested to be above the health advisory levels of 10 mg/L. In response, the county board authorized the establishment of a Groundwater Nitrate Workgroup to compile data, evaluate nitrate sources, research nitrate reduction initiatives and strategies from other areas, and make recommendations to the board.

The workgroup includes county board members, county staff, a representative from the agricultural service sector, and an agricultural producer. Meetings are open to the public, and all are invited to provide input and feedback.

The workgroup's initial goals and direction led to the creation of Farmers on the Rock, a producer-led watershed group that prioritizes peer-to-peer education and nutrient management mentoring. Their work helped confirm

that many producers are already implementing best management practices, reinforcing the understanding that a portion of the nitrate concentration in the groundwater is a product of various factors. Establishing the workgroup

and other local efforts helped secure funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service for innovative conservation practices, including irrigation water management.

The county is doing its part by requiring cover crops and nitrogen efficiency practices at the leased county farm and providing staff support to a local UW-Madison Discovery

Farm research facility. The research includes using pan lysimeter pairs (tools to gauge the amount of water draining from a specific area) to measure the leaching of nitrates through the root zone. The baseline data will be used to implement various practices in the research area, calibrate models, and guide statewide and regional practice standards. ■



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# A Look Beneath the Surface



**Well SC-0982** in Burnett County has an automatic logger connected to a cellular signal, allowing the data to be transmitted in real-time to the web. The site is powered by a solar panel.

*Photo: Jason Smith, 2022*

## ***How the Wisconsin Groundwater-Level Network provides valuable information on county water resources***

*By Meg Haserodt, Hydrologist, U.S. Geological Survey; Pete Chase, Hydrogeologist, and Amy Wiersma, Hydrogeologist, Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey; and Aaron Pruitt, Hydrogeologist, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources*

**T**he Wisconsin Groundwater-Level Monitoring network is a collection of monitoring wells located across the state that has long provided data about the status of the state's groundwater levels.

The well network started in 1946 at the request of the Wisconsin Legislature and became an early example of statewide groundwater data collection.

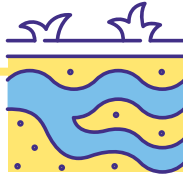
Today, the network has around 100 primary wells providing long-term information on groundwater levels and a few dozen short-term sites used for various groundwater studies around the state. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey collaboratively fund and maintain the network.

The location of network wells was originally constrained by the availability of volunteers to collect manual groundwater level readings. Modern equipment has automated the data

collection process to allow for remote recording of hourly groundwater levels. Now, most wells are visited quarterly to manually download the data from recorders. A few locations use a cellular signal to provide well data to the web in real-time, but cost constraints impede the expansion of this technology to additional wells.

The automation of data collection allows the location of wells to be selected to: 1) provide spatial coverage across the state; 2) monitor the various bedrock, sand and gravel aquifers; 3) collect more information in areas with greater water use from things like municipal water supply pumping and irrigation pumping; 4) assess groundwater responses to climate trends at locations far from pumping; and 5) locate wells on land parcels held by public entities where site access is likely to continue for decades. The current network has at least one well in over 70% of Wisconsin counties (see map on page 23).





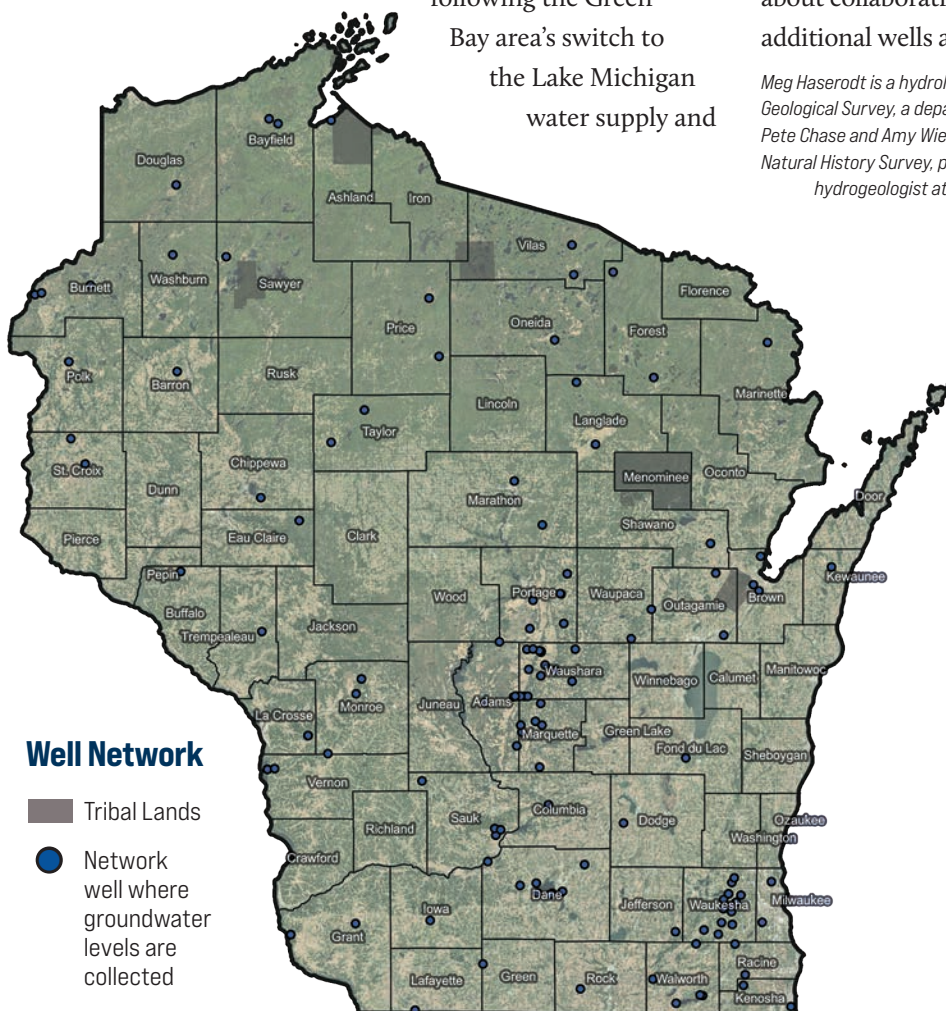
Data from this well network provides a consistent, high-quality record of groundwater-level fluctuations and is a valuable resource on current groundwater conditions in the context of 10-year trends. This data helps land managers and scientists evaluate the effects of well pumping, the response of groundwater levels to drought or increased precipitation, water availability, and the effects of land-use change as well as climate change on groundwater resources.

Data from the monitoring network was a key component in examining the risk of groundwater flooding within specific counties across the state during a recent period of increased precipitation. Network data assisted with examining groundwater recovery following the Green Bay area's switch to the Lake Michigan water supply and

evaluating the city of Waukesha's Great Lakes Compact diversion application for switching from groundwater wells to surface water. It also was used to show the impacts of deep aquifer groundwater pumping in Waukesha County.

This data is available online at no cost using the links below and may provide useful information to county officials on local groundwater conditions. Contact Megan Haserodt from the U.S. Geological Survey at [mhaserodt@usgs.gov](mailto:mhaserodt@usgs.gov), Pete Chase from the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey at [pete.chase@wisc.edu](mailto:pete.chase@wisc.edu), or Aaron Pruitt from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources at [aaron.pruitt@wisconsin.gov](mailto:aaron.pruitt@wisconsin.gov) for more information on accessing the network groundwater data and questions about collaborating with local organizations to add additional wells at new locations. ■

*Meg Haserodt is a hydrologist with the Upper Midwest Science Center in the U.S. Geological Survey, a department of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Pete Chase and Amy Wiersma are hydrogeologists with the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey, part of the UW-Madison Division of Extension. Aaron Pruitt is a hydrogeologist at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.*



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To access well data:

- 1. National Water Information System mapper:**  
[maps.waterdata.usgs.gov/mapper/index.html](https://maps.waterdata.usgs.gov/mapper/index.html)  
["groundwater sites" from menu on left]
- 2. Wisconsin Water Quantity Data Viewer:**  
[dnrm.wisconsin.gov/H5](https://dnrm.wisconsin.gov/H5)  
["Water\_Use\_Viewer" in dropdown]
- 3. Well network background information:**  
[home.wgnhs.wisc.edu](https://home.wgnhs.wisc.edu)  
["Water Resources" in navigation bar]

Base Imagery from Google Earth, copyright 2022; Tribal Lands from Nation, U.S., American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Areas (AIANNH) TIGER/Line Shapefile, 2023, retrieved November 2024.



Groundwater testing in Dunn County.  
Photo: WI Land+Water

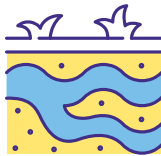
## SECURING SAFE WATER:

# Expanding Eligibility for Wisconsin's Well Compensation Program

*By Christina Anderson, Associate Director, WI Land+Water*

Every Wisconsinite deserves access to clean and safe drinking water. Yet contaminated wells compromise this fundamental necessity for thousands of families across our state. Municipal water systems have resources to test, treat and replace wells using ratepayer funds and state support. Private well owners, though, who manage roughly 800,000 wells, mostly in rural areas, bear the responsibility of testing and maintaining their water systems.

When wells are contaminated, remediation options vary. Municipal utilities can use state loan funds for new



wells or treatment systems. Private well owners may qualify for limited aid under the state's Well Compensation Program, but overly restrictive eligibility criteria exclude many families in need, leaving them alone to face the high costs of ensuring safe water.

### ► A growing water crisis

Private wells supply drinking water to about one-third of Wisconsin residents. Alarming, 10% of these wells exceed safe nitrate levels (10 mg/L), and 3% test positive



annually for E. coli. Elevated nitrate is linked to blue baby syndrome in infants and increased cancer risks, while E. coli contamination is an indicator of harmful pathogens that can cause severe gastrointestinal illnesses.

Replacing or treating a contaminated well can cost thousands of dollars, an expense many families cannot afford. Programs like the state's Well Compensation Program are intended to provide relief, but restrictive requirements undermine their effectiveness.

The program only assists households earning \$65,000 or less annually, with reduced funding for those making over \$45,000. Moreover, eligibility is limited to wells contaminated with nitrate levels exceeding 40 mg/L, which is four times the safe drinking water standard. This threshold was initially designed to address the economic impact of nitrate contamination on livestock health but fails to account for the significant public health risks Wisconsin families face. Additionally, wells must serve livestock to qualify, which excludes non-farm households.

These criteria are impractical and unjust, forcing families to choose between unsafe water and financial hardship.

### ► An opportunity for change

Encouragingly, bipartisan efforts have emerged to reform the Well Compensation Program. In 2022, Gov. Tony Evers allocated \$10 million from the American Rescue Plan Act to expand eligibility as a test run for proposed legislative reforms. ARPA grants provided much-needed relief by:

- Raising household income caps to \$100,000
- Extending eligibility to non-livestock wells and small businesses, such as restaurants, churches and daycares
- Including costs for well replacement, treatment and sealing unused wells
- Eliminating deductibles

This more inclusive approach demonstrated the program's potential to deliver equitable and effective solutions.

After about two years, the ARPA funding was exhausted. During that time, 384 wells were replaced, and 104 treatment systems were installed, primarily addressing



nitrate contamination but also tackling issues like E. coli, PFAS and arsenic. Once the funding ran out, however, the program reverted to its previous restrictive eligibility requirements, leaving many well owners struggling to figure out how to address harmful water issues on their own.

In recent years, Republican lawmakers representing rural districts have introduced proposals to address the eligibility challenges of the Well Compensation Program. Their leadership highlights a bipartisan commitment to ensuring access to safe drinking water for all

Wisconsinites and offers hope that meaningful changes could finally be within reach.

### ► Proposed reforms

To build on this momentum, Wisconsin legislators must act decisively to reform the Well Compensation Program.

*Continued on page 26*



Key changes include:

- 1. Expand income eligibility:** Raise the household income cap to at least \$100,000 to ensure that middle-income families struggling with contamination aren't excluded.
- 2. Broaden contamination criteria:** Allow assistance for any well exceeding safe drinking water standards. Families shouldn't have to wait for nitrate levels to reach four times the standard before receiving help.
- 3. Eliminate the livestock requirement:** Prioritizing cattle over families' public health is unjust. Eligibility should extend to all households facing contamination.
- 4. Include non-community wells:** Small businesses like restaurants, churches and daycares also rely on clean water. Extending eligibility to them will protect public health and local economies.
- 5. Increase funding caps:** Current reimbursement limits often fall short of covering the full cost of well rehabilitation. Higher caps would ensure families can address contamination without undue financial strain.

### ► A shared responsibility

Ensuring clean drinking water requires collective action. While well owners play a critical role in testing and maintaining their systems, they cannot shoulder the burden of widespread contamination alone. State funding programs are essential to bridging this gap, and Wisconsin's legislators have an opportunity to make a lasting impact.

Clean drinking water is a basic human right. By expanding the Well Compensation Program's eligibility criteria, we can ensure every Wisconsinite, regardless of income, location, or well type, has access to this essential resource.

With bipartisan efforts already underway, there's hope for meaningful change. Let's seize this opportunity to secure safe water, not only for today's families but for future generations who will rely on our groundwater to sustain their health and livelihoods. ■

*Christina Anderson is the associate director for the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association (WI Land+Water), a nonprofit membership organization that supports the efforts of around 450 land conservation committee supervisors and 370 conservation staff in 72 county land and water conservation department offices.*



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# Meet the New County Executive

## RALPH MALICKI: Fostering Growth, Collaboration and Community in Racine County

Born and raised in Racine County, Ralph Malicki has lived in the county all his life, deeply connected to the community he serves. As the owner of Malicki's Piggly Wiggly from 2011 to 2024, he embodied a spirit of servant leadership by making local grocery shopping more than just a transaction, creating a hub of community connection where excellent service met genuine care for his neighbors.

After closing his store and the unexpected passing of the late County Executive Jonathan Delagrave, Malicki decided to channel his dedication to the community into a new role by running for office, winning a special election in December. With a people-first philosophy, he continues to lead with a focus on collaboration and progress.

### ► A calling to serve

Public service has always been a natural fit for Malicki. "I've been involved in public service my entire adult life. It felt natural to step into roles where I could contribute to the community." Over the years, Malicki has played an active role in shaping Racine County through his service on numerous community boards, including the Downtown Racine Corporation, HALO Inc., Racine Zoological Society, United Way of Racine County, Visit Racine County, Racine County Food Bank, the Culinary Advisory Board for

Gateway Technical College and Racine Unified School District, and Crimestoppers. His involvement reflects a deep commitment to addressing diverse community needs, from homelessness and food security to education and tourism.

Malicki's dedication to service goes beyond board memberships. He consistently advocates for initiatives that strengthen Racine's social fabric and foster long-term growth. Recognized with honors such as the Community Impact Award from Jonathan Delagrave and the Sam Johnson Volunteer Award from the Racine County Economic Development Corporation, Malicki has earned a reputation as a leader who delivers meaningful results while keeping the community's best interests at heart.

### ► Opportunities and Challenges: Two sides of the same coin

Taking on the role of county executive comes with its fair share of opportunities and challenges — often intertwined. Malicki says that one of his primary tasks is to build relationships with a diverse array of stakeholders, from community and



*Ralph Malicki*

***“Building relationships with the people in the community and working together to achieve common goals presents a rewarding opportunity and a meaningful challenge.” – Ralph Malicki***

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business leaders to local municipalities. “Building relationships with the people in the community and working together to achieve common goals presents a rewarding opportunity and a meaningful challenge, as it requires fostering trust and collaboration across diverse groups.”

Fiscal health also stands at the forefront of his priorities. Ensuring Racine County’s economic stability requires careful stewardship of resources and strategic planning. Malicki envisions fostering growth by attracting new businesses and supporting existing ones. “Economic development is key. We need to continue to create an environment where businesses can thrive and where people want to live and work.” These efforts, while ambitious, reflect Malicki’s determination to position Racine County as a leader in Wisconsin’s economic landscape.

► **A legacy of stewardship and collaboration**

When asked about the legacy he hopes to leave behind, Malicki’s answer is clear and heartfelt: “I want to be remembered as a good steward of resources and a team builder. I want people to say I left the county better than I found it.” His vision extends beyond his term, focusing on sustainable growth and fostering a culture of collaboration within the county’s administration and across the community at large. By uniting people around shared goals, Malicki aims to ensure that Racine County continues to thrive for years to come.

► **Leading from the front**

Malicki’s leadership style is rooted in active involvement and open communication. “I lead from out front. I like to be involved, listening to staff, and taking their recommendations seriously,” he explains. His approach prioritizes weighing the pros and cons of every decision and building consensus to achieve the best outcomes. This inclusive and thoughtful style has earned him the respect of colleagues and community members alike, reinforcing his reputation as a leader who values collaboration over command.

► **A hidden talent – and a humbling experience**

While Malicki’s professional life is well-documented, there’s a lighter side to his story that often surprises people. He has a hobby of restoring old tractors — a meticulous and rewarding pastime that reflects his appreciation for craftsmanship and history. On the flip side, not every endeavor has been a success. “I once tried playing the fiddle,” he chuckles. “It wasn’t my calling.” These personal anecdotes highlight Malicki’s grounded nature and his willingness to embrace challenges, whether in the workplace or in his hobbies.

► **Looking ahead**

As county executive, Malicki’s vision for Racine County is one of unity, growth and resilience. His background, dedication and leadership style make him a dynamic leader who will surely leave a lasting impact. Under his guidance, Racine County is poised to not only overcome challenges but to seize opportunities that will benefit its residents for generations to come. ■

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Photo: Tim Chatman

# HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE

## The economic impact of the Green Bay Packers and the 2025 NFL Draft on the state of Wisconsin

*By Dr. Olajide Idris Sanusi, Assistant Professor of Economics, Dr. Bardia Batala, Assistant Professor in Business Administration, and Kevin M. Jaklin, Assistant Teaching Professor, UW-Green Bay*

The annual National Football League Draft is one of the most anticipated events in professional sports, drawing significant attention from fans, media and businesses nationwide. In April, Greater Green Bay will host the 2025 NFL Draft, marking a significant moment for sports enthusiasts and for Wisconsin's economy.

The Green Bay Packers organization has a profound and growing economic impact on the state of Wisconsin, not just the Green Bay region. Its impact can be seen through its operations, events and community initiatives, which collectively contribute to the local and state economies through direct spending, direct investment, job creation and enhanced community engagement.

### ► Direct economic contributions

The Packers' operations and events generate substantial economic activities, which have increased significantly over time. In 2009, the total economic impact of the Packers and

Lambeau Field was estimated at approximately \$282 million, including 2,560 jobs and over \$124 million in earnings. By the 2023-2024 fiscal year, that number has grown more than 46% to \$414 million. As an entity, the Packers' revenue alone reached approximately \$654 million, reflecting a steady growth in their economic impact.

**Home games:** Each Packers home game contributes significantly to the local economy. In 2009, off-site visitor spending for preseason and regular-season games totaled approximately \$82.3 million, or about \$8.2 million per game. Now, that impact is about \$121 million or \$12.1 million per game, reflecting increased stadium capacity and attendance and higher spending per visitor.

**Training camp:** The Packers' training camp also plays a crucial role. In 2009, off-site visitor spending was estimated at \$5.1 million, and the total economic impact of the training camp was \$7.4 million, including 90 jobs and \$2.3 million



in wages. With the addition of new events and increased attendance, these figures have grown. Today, the training camp likely represents an economic impact of over \$10 million.

### ► Fiscal contributions

The Packers' activities generate significant tax revenues for the state and local governments. In 2009, the fiscal impact of Packers' operations, including state sales tax, stadium district tax, room tax, and state income tax, was approximately \$15.2 million. This includes \$8.1 million from visitors to Packers games and \$517,000 from visitors to the training camp. By 2024, the Packers' increased economic activities and higher revenues have likely led to even greater fiscal contributions in the range of \$20 million annually, which support public services and infrastructure throughout the state.

### ► Community and charitable impact

The Packers' community initiatives further enhance their economic impact. In the past year, the Packers Give Back outreach initiative contributed more than \$13 million in charitable impact through grants, donations and community events. Programs like the Packers Mentor-Protégé Program have created over 422 jobs and increased annual revenue for participating statewide businesses by a combined total of \$105.9 million. These initiatives not only support many communities throughout the state but also foster economic resilience and growth.

### ► Titledown and TitledownTech impacts

Titledown, located on nearly 45 acres of land just west of Lambeau Field, is the Packers' mixed-use, community development with a multi-acre stretch of park space that features year-round activities, events and daily recreation. Titledown, which will be more than a \$300-million development upon completion, is maximizing its unique location to attract visitors, spur regional economic growth, offer amenities to residents and complement the greater Green Bay area's draw as an attractive location to live, work and play. Titledown annually sees more than 900,000 visitors who take part in hundreds of events and activities, from home-game weekend festivities to winter ice skating and snow tubing.

Featured in the development is TitledownTech, a venture capital firm formed through a partnership between the Green Bay Packers and Microsoft. It has significantly impacted the economic landscape of Green Bay and Wisconsin. By 2023, TitledownTech had raised \$95 million in total capital, supporting early-stage companies across various industries. This influx of capital has fostered innovation, created jobs and attracted new businesses to the region and state, contributing to a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The firm's investments have led to the development of cutting-edge technologies and the establishment of

*Continued on page 32*



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new businesses, further enhancing the state's economy. TitledownTech's involvement in initiatives such as Oculogica, an artificial intelligence innovation lab in New Richmond, underscores its commitment to technological advancement and economic growth. These efforts have positioned Wisconsin as a hub for innovation, attracting talent and investment throughout the state.

### ► **Forecast: Economic impact of the 2025 NFL Draft**

The upcoming 2025 NFL Draft in Green Bay is expected to have a major economic impact on the region and state. Hosting the three-day draft will attract a substantial influx of visitors, which will boost the economy throughout the state. The event will feature several days of activities, including the NFL Draft Experience and a massive free football festival near Lambeau Field. This will attract fans from across the country, increasing spending on accommodations, dining and travel at airports throughout the state.

According to Discover Green Bay and the Packers,

the economic impact of the NFL Draft is estimated to be \$94 million statewide, of which \$74 million will benefit the state outside the Green Bay area. The worldwide exposure will also enhance visibility for Green Bay and Wisconsin, potentially leading to long-term economic benefits through increased repeat tourism, home purchases and business investment.

The Green Bay Packers are a vital economic engine for Green Bay and Wisconsin, driving significant economic activity through their operations, events and community initiatives. The 2025 NFL Draft is poised to further amplify this impact, showcasing the region on a national stage and delivering substantial economic benefits. ■

*Dr. Olajide Idris Sanusi is an assistant professor of economics, Dr. Bardia Batala is an assistant professor of economics, and Kevin M. Jaklin is an associate lecturer in corporate finance at UW-Green Bay.*

#### **Sources:**

- 2010 Economic Impact Report
- 2010 Economic Impact Findings
- 2023-2024 Packers Annual Report
- Packers.com NFL Draft story, May 24, 2023

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# New Homestead Credit Incentive Gives Buyers in Adams County “Peace of Mind”

*By Abigail Becker, Senior Associate for Communications & Outreach, UW-Madison UniverCity Alliance*

**W**hen Shane Melby was in the process of buying a house in Adams County, he learned about a \$2,500

homestead credit that he was eligible to apply for as he purchased his new home.

“That was a really nice surprise. I didn’t expect that \$2,500, so that was nice to help recoup finances,” said Melby, 35. “If somebody is tight on funds, this grant money is great, because you could use that toward your first month’s mortgage. It’s a little bit of a safety net.”

The new Homestead Credit Incentive exists partly



**UniverCity Alliance**  
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because of a partnership between Adams County and UW-Madison’s UniverCity Alliance. According to Adams County Economic Development, the incentive,

first offered in 2024, is designed to support the construction of new homes and encourage workers to establish residency in the county by purchasing existing properties.

Daric Smith, executive director of Adams County Economic Development, said the county is experiencing a housing shortage and sees a large influx of people who work in the area but live in other counties. He’s hoping the credit will be one tool that could help.

***“If somebody is tight on funds, this grant money is great, because you could use that toward your first month’s mortgage. It’s a little bit of a safety net.”***

— Shane Melby

“The employees want to be here. It’s just a matter of finding a place for them to live,” Smith said. “It does give (buyers) a little extra incentive, a little peace of mind.”

Adams County Economic Development allocated \$10,000 for the program in 2024 and hopes to do the same in 2025. Two people received the credit this year, and three have already been approved for 2025. Smith said he hopes the program also shows the community that leaders are committed to investing in the county.

“The Adams County Homestead Credit lets people know that the county is really being proactive in trying to get people to move in and to move things forward,” Smith said.

Attracting and retaining new residents, particularly young professionals, to Adams County was a focus area when the county partnered in 2019-22 with UniverCity Alliance — a program at UW-Madison that connects local governments with university resources to address community-identified challenges.

One of the reports included case studies from other counties across the country, several of which have housing credit programs. Smith said this report inspired the new credit in Adams County.

Through UniverCity, Adams County completed 38 projects on economic development, education and health in partnership with UW-Madison faculty, students and courses.

“The partnership gave us a ton of information we normally wouldn’t have had access to, or we would have had to pay a ridiculous amount of money for,” Smith said.

Smith also said the partnership was refreshing, bringing a new element to his day-to-day work, and created collaborations with a range of people with different perspectives to consider. This is one of the unique benefits of UniverCity’s model of connecting the university with Wisconsin communities: a two-way exchange of knowledge.

“When we can connect local experts in Wisconsin communities with students who are eager to learn and instructors who care about answering real-world questions, everyone benefits,” UniverCity Alliance Managing Director Gavin Luter said.

For John O’Malley, the student who worked on the report that inspired the credit program, the partnership offered a practical internship experience that could

*Continued on page 36*



## UniverCity Alliance Announces New Community Partnerships

**Sheboygan, Racine, Trempealeau and Monroe** counties and the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association (WL Land+Water) are partnering with UniverCity Alliance to support local initiatives and address community-identified challenges.

“Our primary goals are to be the front door that welcomes these communities into the university and to connect them with the best tools and resources that can meet their needs,” UniverCity Alliance Managing Director Gavin Luter said.

The new group marks two firsts for UniverCity: Racine County is the first returning UniverCity partner, and WL Land+Water is the first nonprofit to collaborate with UniverCity on its own.

Now in its 10th year, UniverCity has partnered with 42 community partners, including counties, municipalities, towns, nonprofits, and a school district. Through these collaborative partnerships, over 400 projects have been completed.

“UniverCity Alliance launched in 2015 with a founding mission to make the university more accessible to Wisconsin local governments,” Luter said. “A decade later, we have learned from Wisconsin communities, honed our partnership program, and brought the Wisconsin Idea to life through a two-way exchange of knowledge.”

Interested in working with UniverCity? Email UniverCity at [UniverCityAlliance@wisc.edu](mailto:UniverCityAlliance@wisc.edu). □

Continued from page 35

demonstrate his research abilities to future employers.

O'Malley graduated in 2022 with a bachelor's degree in political science and international studies. In 2023, he completed a master's degree in international public affairs from the La Follette School of Public Affairs. O'Malley is now a federal investigator for the U.S. Department of Labor.

"It was nice to have a community partner view me as a real resource for them," O'Malley said. "I'm very pleased they decided to take some action on the grant program because that was my favorite proposal based on how other rural midwestern communities have successfully addressed population decline."

The heart of the UniverCity Alliance is leveraging student work to advance priorities identified by Wisconsin communities. This model supports communities and creates



#### LEARN MORE

**Adams County Homestead Credit:**  
[developadamscountywi.com](http://developadamscountywi.com)

**UniverCity Adams County Research:**  
[univercity.wisc.edu](http://univercity.wisc.edu)  
(select "UniverCity Communities"  
under the "UniverCity Year" tab and  
scroll down to Adams County)

high-impact, unique learning experiences for students.

"Students often work on simulated projects in classes, but UniverCity Alliance gets students connected with opportunities to make a real-world impact through their coursework. Also, students like John may never get the

chance to learn about communities like Adams County if it weren't for UniverCity Alliance," Luter said.

Melby, who recently proposed to his girlfriend, is looking forward to their future in his Adams County home.

"I've lived in this area my entire life, and I do love Adams County," Melby said. "There's that hometown feel, and people seem to really care about their neighbors." ■

*Abigail Becker is the senior associate for communications and outreach at the UW-Madison UniverCity Alliance. The mission of UniverCity is to improve the quality and visibility of UW-Madison's education, research and service contribution to the high-road development of local communities that reflect the values of equity, democracy and sustainability.*

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# Uniquely Wisconsin's Season Three Wraps Up

## STORYTELLING CONTINUES WITH SEASON FOUR

*By Michelle Gormican Thompson,  
Thompson Communications*

**T**he stories of our Wisconsin, quite simply, are fascinating. Generations of families, as well as newcomers to our state and nation, have made their imprint on our agriculture, arts, culture, and, of course, our food. Taking a close and intimate look into these stories has been Uniquely Wisconsin, which began in 2021 and just wrapped up season three.

The first three seasons featured Adams, Ashland, Calumet, Green Lake, Jefferson, Kenosha, Lincoln, Oconto, Price, Portage, Marathon, Monroe, Racine, Rock, Sauk, Sheboygan, Washington and Wood counties. Joining the Uniquely Wisconsin roster for season four, kicking off this September, includes five additional counties — Brown, Marathon, Outagamie, Pierce and Washington.

“Entering season four in 2025, we are so excited to continue to share the amazing stories of our people and our culture of Wisconsin,” said WCA President & CEO Mark O’Connell. “There have been so many metrics on the success of the program, including being recognized with two Emmys. But what stands out to me are all the conversations I’ve had with county officials around the state on what the telling of their stories means to their community, as well as the economic impact of this investment.”



### CALUMET COUNTY

*The owners of Scoops Ice Cream in Chilton, who also own Terra Verde's Coffeehouse, take pride in making quality ice cream and being part of the community.*

Uniquely Wisconsin utilizes video, broadcast television, audio, podcasts and social media to tell the stories of local communities, highlighting families, community groups/activities, community kindness, those in the service and hospitality industry, artists, and creators.

### ► Season 3 stories

In season three, 15 stories from the five Uniquely Wisconsin counties were released. These stories can be seen at [youtube.com/DiscoverWI](https://youtube.com/DiscoverWI), the Uniquely Wisconsin YouTube channel.

They include:

#### ■ ASHLAND COUNTY

- **Ryan Thimm:** A True Champion for Accessibility in Glidden
- **Reviving Tradition, Ensuring Tomorrow:** Ashland Fishing & Bad River Fish Hatchery
- **Weaving Passion with Tradition in Bad River:** April Stone and the Art of Basket Weaving

#### ■ CALUMET COUNTY

- **Coffee Roasting & Ice Cream Making:** Partners Behind Terra Verde's Coffeehouse and Scoops Ice Cream



- **Family Farms, Community Gatherings and Homegrown Wines:** The Woelfel Homestead's Journey in New Holstein
- **Olympic Biathlon Training Facility:** Arians Nordic Center in Brillion

## JEFFERSON COUNTY

- **Lifeline for Youth:** Jefferson County's Brand-New Youth Stabilization Program
- **How William Hoard Created the Dairy State:** Jefferson County's Hoard's Dairyman
- **The Artists Behind Trek's Project One Bikes:** Cycling in Waterloo

## LINCOLN COUNTY

- **From Vision to Reality:** The Impact of Chris Schotz on Lincoln County Trails
- **The People Behind the Thunder:** Tomahawk Fall Ride
- **Wisconsin Musher and the Love for Their Dogs:** Beauty Behind Dog Sledding



## LINCOLN COUNTY

*Thanks to countless volunteers, the Underdown Segment of the Ice Age Trail in Lincoln County provides 37 miles dedicated to hiking and single-track biking.*



## OCONTO COUNTY

*Dirt City Motorplex, a one-mile short course track for off-road racing, attracts thousands of spectators and racers to Oconto County each year.*

## OCONTO COUNTY

- **Roaring Engines & Rising Stars:** Off-Road Racing at Wisconsin's Dirt City Motorplex
- **Gillett Roots & Oconto County Fishing:** Mirrocraft & Montego Bay Pontoons
- **Uncover Culinary Charm in the Northwoods:** Braise North

## ► Season 4 coming in September

Season four episodes showcasing Brown, Marathon, Outagamie, Pierce and Washington counties will go public in early September as online docuseries shorts. These stories also will be featured in broadcast episodes of the "Discover Wisconsin" show and "The Cabin" podcast.

"It is truly an honor to continue to showcase the quiet stories and the more visible ones that make our state truly special," said Mark Rose, president & CEO of Discover Mediaworks, Inc. "As with all Uniquely Wisconsin stories, our team is currently working closely with season four counties for topics, shoots and production. This collaboration is what makes the product so authentic and special, and we can't wait to bring season four to life." ■

To see Uniquely Wisconsin season four stories when they debut in September, as well as the three current seasons, visit Discover Wisconsin's YouTube page at [youtube.com/DiscoverWI](https://youtube.com/DiscoverWI) and scroll down to the "Uniquely Wisconsin" section. You can also listen to "The Cabin" podcast, which features participating counties, on your favorite podcast player.

To learn more and join the Emmy Award-winning Uniquely Wisconsin brand, contact WCA President & CEO Mark O'Connell at 866-404-2700 or Washington County Executive Josh Schoemann at 262-306-2200.





Save the dates for upcoming webinars:

- March 26
- April 23
- May 28
- June 25
- July 23
- August 27
- October 22
- November 19
- December 17

## March “In the Board Room” Expands on County Zoning Discussion

The next WCA “In the Board Room with Attorney Andy Phillips and Attolles Law” monthly webinar, scheduled for noon on Wednesday, March 26, will be an expanded discussion of Act 264 and the legal implications beyond general zoning.

2023 Wisconsin Act 264 and related legislation allowing a town to withdraw from county zoning have been discussed in previous “In the Board Room” sessions. However, the impact of Act 264 goes beyond zoning. A town withdrawal also modifies a county’s role in providing services and

oversight in other land use matters. The March session of “In the Board Room” will address these lesser-discussed implications of Act 264, including a county’s role in subdivision plat review and the farmland preservation program process after a town “opts out” of county zoning.

To attend the live webinars, pre-registration at [bit.ly/InTheBoardRoom25](https://bit.ly/InTheBoardRoom25) is required to receive the webinar link. There is no cost to register. The webinars are recorded and posted on the WCA website at [wicounties.org](https://wicounties.org). ■

## County Officials Lobby Legislators at Initial 2023 CAP Meeting

On January 23, county officials participating in the WCA County Ambassador Program met in Madison for a day of briefings and legislative meetings. The day focused on the 2025-27 state budget and advancing the interests of county government.

The WCA Government Affairs staff briefed attendees on the WCA priorities before county officials met with their legislators at the state Capitol.

The next 2025 CAP meeting is on **April 17** at the Best Western Premier Park Hotel and the Wisconsin State Capitol. The day will focus on human services.

Confirmed participation in the WCA County Ambassador Program is required to attend. If you are interested but have not yet signed up to participate, contact WCA Government Affairs Associate Marcie Rainbolt at [rainbolt@wicounties.org](mailto:rainbolt@wicounties.org) for more information.

County officials are responsible for travel expenses. The WCA provides a continental breakfast and lunch.

## Milwaukee County Board Chair Keynoted 2025 MLK Celebration

In January, Milwaukee Board of Supervisors Chair Marcelia Nicholson gave the keynote address at the 45th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration hosted in the state Capitol.

Nicholson spoke about her work that centers on policy to meet King’s standard of a “just law” for impoverished communities experiencing disparities and injustices due to legislation.

“Social justice isn’t just a goal, it’s a daily responsibility to stand with those most vulnerable and ensure fairness, dignity and opportunity for all,” Nicholson said. “Remember, justice does not wait. It’s alive... Let’s keep Dr. King’s dream alive, not just as a legacy, but as a living, breathing force, together.”

Nicholson, a former fourth-grade Milwaukee Public Schools teacher, was elected to the Milwaukee County Board in 2016. She is the first Black woman and Latina to serve as chairwoman of the board.



## GHT/County Mutual 2025 Scholarship Opportunities

Applications are being accepted until May 9 for scholarships to a Wisconsin college or university from the WCA Group Health Trust and the Wisconsin County Mutual Insurance Corporation. Visit [wcaght.org](http://wcaght.org) and [wisconsincountymutual.org](http://wisconsincountymutual.org) for details.

## MONDAY COUNTY LEADERSHIP MEETINGS

Join the WCA every Monday at 11 a.m. for the County Leadership Meeting. This weekly virtual meeting features updates from the WCA Government Affairs team and Attolles Law, association announcements, and guest speakers, such as state agency staff and legislators.

A virtual meeting link is emailed to WCA members each week.



## Submit Your Ideas

Planning is underway for the 87th WCA Annual Conference, which will be held Sept. 21-23, 2025, in Wisconsin Dells.

The WCA wants ideas from its members on potential topics and speakers for the concurrent workshops and general sessions.

*To submit your ideas, visit [bit.ly/2025WCA\\_Ideas](http://bit.ly/2025WCA_Ideas) by March 31.*

## Sheboygan County Recognized for Pavement Preservation

The highway division of the Sheboygan County Transportation Department has received the 2024 James B. Sorenson Award for Excellence in Pavement Preservation from FP2 Inc. (formerly known as the Foundation for Pavement Preservation), a nonprofit trade association supported by the pavement preservation industry, contractors, material suppliers and equipment manufacturers.

Sheboygan County was selected for proactively embracing the challenges of a sustainable paving program by “leading through collaboration and innovation.”

The extensive award application outlines the county’s funding strategies, public engagement, and investments in research, equipment, and technologies to meet its ambitious goal of increasing pavement life cycles to 30 years from the standard 15 years.

In the application, the county notes that “by investing in a less expensive preservation treatment instead of investing in a new surface at year 15, agencies can use savings to

complete the needed improvements on other roads.”

Sheboygan County’s initiatives include using centerline rumble strips with a preservation treatment for enhanced safety and a robust chip sealing program. The

county has also engaged a full-scale research section called SCOPE to gain a proactive understanding of roadway stressors, which has improved maintenance practices.

Sheboygan County maintains its own full road construction, preservation, maintenance and reconstruction services. Owning and maintaining “the road from quarry to recycling” provides the county “a unique perspective on preservation and incentivizes

the county to begin the preservation process at the time of construction.”

To learn more about Sheboygan County’s pavement preservation efforts, visit [bit.ly/Sheboygan\\_Sorenson](http://bit.ly/Sheboygan_Sorenson).

Previous recipients of the award include the Ohio, New Hampshire and California departments of transportation, and the city of Nashville, Tennessee.



# Opioid Litigation Effort Update

By Andy Phillips, Attorney, Attolles Law

In 2017, Wisconsin counties became some of the first local governments in the country to file suit against the persons and entities responsible for creating the opioid epidemic. At the time, it was difficult to predict the scale of the litigation as additional state and local governments joined the litigation effort. We soon learned that the opioid litigation would become the largest and arguably most complex litigation our country has ever seen.

Despite challenges and complexities, local governments remain steadfast in their mission of forcing responsible parties to provide financial resources to combat the epidemic. To date, settlements nationwide exceed \$50 billion in total and additional revenue streams are expected. Wisconsin is set to receive more than \$750 million in settlement proceeds over the next 13 years. Just recently, Purdue Pharma and its owners agreed to pay \$7.4 billion to settle claims against the embattled manufacturer. Additional claims against various industry participants continue to date.

## ► The Wisconsin county effort moving forward

Tracking the various revenue streams is not a simple task. Several contingencies contained within the various settlement agreements related to “bonus” payments, “penalties” and prepayment credits make it difficult to predict with certainty what dollars are available to counties to invest in battling the epidemic. This difficulty has caused counties to be cautious in their commitment to the fight. In an era of hard levy caps, overextending a financial commitment could lead to dire consequences for other vital county programs and services.

The WCA is dedicated to assisting counties in their effort to determine how much funding will be made available from the various settlements. To that end, the WCA and its research partner Forward Analytics are busy compiling data and information for stakeholders to better estimate the various revenue streams in particular counties.

In addition, the WCA has worked diligently with stakeholders at the state and local levels in creating resources to assist counties with their planning efforts. A few examples of the resources are:

- Creating a website dedicated to sharing information on county efforts at abatement and providing resources in the planning effort — [wisopioidabatement.com](http://wisopioidabatement.com)
- Hosting summits where county officials and employees gather to exchange ideas and information and hear from state officials regarding statewide efforts
- Meeting with community stakeholders with an interest in providing resources and expertise in dealing with the opioid epidemic





- Engaging with the National Association of Counties to learn about efforts around the country that could assist Wisconsin counties

## ► Conclusion

Stay tuned for additional information from the WCA concerning opportunities for collaboration surrounding the investment of the settlement proceeds. As always, should you have any questions surrounding the county effort in the opioid litigation or the WCA's work in assisting counties with

the process of determining how to best invest the settlement resources, please do not hesitate to contact the WCA. ■

*This article is not intended as a comprehensive guide to the settlements, settlement values and planning efforts. It is impossible to even attempt to summarize all the information in an orderly fashion. Likewise, there continue to be developments impacting the settlements and bankruptcy proceedings. Therefore, it is important to review the latest information to fully understand your county's interests. For additional insight on these topics, please consult with your corporation counsel and the attorneys who represented your county in the litigation. In addition to organizing periodic opioid summits, which provide an opportunity for collaboration, the WCA has created an online repository of information surrounding abatement efforts at [wisopioidabatement.com](http://wisopioidabatement.com). If you have any other questions surrounding this topic, please do not hesitate to contact the WCA or the author.*



### NACo Membership Series: First 100 Days

The National Association of Counties launched a new membership series to provide timely updates and analysis on key developments during the first 100 days of the Trump administration. These webinars focus on policies and actions that directly impact counties, including federal funding, regulations and intergovernmental partnerships. Attend the online events to stay informed on how these changes may shape county priorities and operations.

Visit [bit.ly/NACo\\_100Days](http://bit.ly/NACo_100Days) to register for upcoming webinars and access the recordings.

### Apply Today for 2025 NACo Achievement Awards

Applications are now open for the NACo 2025 Achievement Awards. Apply today and celebrate your county's most innovative programming.

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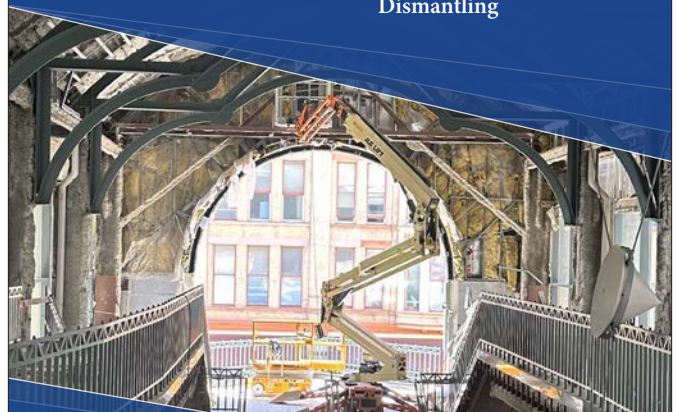
Visit [bit.ly/NACo\\_Awards](http://bit.ly/NACo_Awards) for more information and to apply by March 31, 2025.

### Celebrate National County Government Month in April 2025

National County Government Month, held each April, is an annual celebration of county government. Visit [bit.ly/CtyGovtMonth](http://bit.ly/CtyGovtMonth) to explore NACo's toolkit for ideas and tools to help your county participate.

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LEGAL ISSUES  
RELATING TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT

# Addressing Groundwater Concerns in Livestock Siting and CAFO Regulations

## THE COUNTY ROLE

*By Andy Phillips, Rebecca Roeker and Malia Malone, Attorneys, Attolles Law, s.c.*

Groundwater quality is a critical concern in Wisconsin, especially in regions with a high density of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs). These large-scale livestock facilities produce substantial amounts of manure and wastewater, which, if not managed properly, may lead to groundwater contamination.

In Wisconsin, counties face significant legal hurdles in attempting to regulate livestock siting facilities and CAFOs due to the preemption of local regulations by state laws. This article explores the boundaries of county authority, the regulatory framework governing CAFOs, and the options available to counties within the confines of state law.

### ► The regulatory landscape

State statute and administrative code govern livestock siting and CAFOs in Wisconsin, with the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) holding primary authority. Counties are generally preempted from imposing regulations stricter than state standards. This includes water quality regulations under Chapter NR 151 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code and other provisions regulating agricultural practices.

A county may adopt more stringent regulations only if the county can demonstrate, to the satisfaction of DATCP

and the DNR, that such measures are necessary to protect specific local resources. This option is described in greater detail below.

### ► Key legal principles

**State preemption.** Wisconsin law explicitly limits local governments' ability to regulate livestock siting and CAFOs in ways that exceed state standards. In *Adams v. State Livestock Facilities Siting Review Board*,<sup>1</sup> the Wisconsin Supreme Court confirmed the general principle that state law preempts local ordinances unless local regulations are expressly authorized by statute. While the Supreme Court recognized that livestock siting presents a "mixed bag" of statewide and local concerns that may warrant local regulation, any local regulation must complement, rather than conflict with, the state regulation. Wisconsin law also recognizes a narrow exception for local regulations that exceed the performance standards or prohibitions set forth in Wis. Admin. Code Ch. NR 150. These are discussed in greater detail below.

**Moratoria.** Pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 59.69(4), counties have limited authority to impose moratoria on CAFO development.<sup>2</sup> Such actions must comply with statutory and other legal requirements, including the demonstration of an immediate need, careful documentation, and adherence to strict timelines for review and action.



*Counties may regulate aspects of livestock siting, like manure storage structures and nutrient management plans, but such ordinances must align with state regulations unless state approval for stricter measures is obtained.*

In light of the limitations on a county to implement a development moratorium, it is advisable for counties to proceed cautiously when considering putting a temporary halt on new CAFO-related operations. The law surrounding a county's exercise of its zoning authority in this regard is not well-settled and corporation counsel must be consulted before taking any official action. In the event a moratorium is imposed, counties should establish firm timelines for completing their review of conditions that predate the need for the moratorium. This should include a reasonable end date for the moratorium. Again, it is important for counties to work closely with their corporation counsel to ensure that any moratorium is appropriate and legally defensible.

► **Permitted local regulations**

Certainly, the DNR may enforce the CAFO regulations contained in Wis. Admin. Code Ch. NR 151; however, the reality is that the department relies heavily on its local county partners to assist in enforcement actions. Local governments may adopt ordinances consistent with state standards. They may also work in partnership with DNR through memorandums of understanding, which clarify roles and responsibilities in enforcement and implementation.

► **Exceptions to preemption**

**1. Securing state approval.** Section 92.15(3) of the Wisconsin Statutes allows a county to pursue livestock siting performance standards and regulations that exceed state standards if the county can demonstrate that these measures are necessary to achieve state water quality standards set forth in Wis. Stat. § 281.15. To obtain approval, a county must submit detailed evidence to DATCP and the DNR to justify why the stricter standards are needed and

why state standards are insufficient. The review processes detailed in Wis. Admin. Code Ch. NR 151.096 and Wis. Admin. Code Ch. ATCP 50.60 ensure that proposed local regulations meet statutory requirements and only allow exceptions for cases in which additional local regulation is necessary to achieve state water quality standards. Again, counties considering this process should work closely with their corporation counsel at the earliest opportunity when considering making a request to DATCP and the DNR.

**2. Specific local actions.** Counties may regulate aspects of livestock siting, like manure storage structures and nutrient management plans, but such ordinances must align with state regulations unless state approval for stricter measures is obtained. Additionally, any amendments to existing ordinances likely will not apply retroactively to current operations.

From a zoning perspective, Wisconsin law allows counties to adopt zoning regulations to regulate livestock citing facilities. This authority also faces limitations. For example, Wis. Stat. § 93.90(4) places significant limitations on a county's disapproving or prohibiting a livestock facility in any area that is zoned agricultural. Wis. Stat. § 93.90(4) (ae) also sets forth requirements for a zoning ordinance requiring a conditional use permit or special exception for the siting or expansion of livestock facilities.

► **Recent legal developments**

Recent legal developments in Wisconsin have further clarified the regulatory landscape concerning county authority over livestock siting and CAFOs.

**Town of Ledgeview v. Livestock Facility Siting Review**

**Board (2022)**<sup>3</sup> — In this case, Ledgeview Farms applied for a permit to expand its livestock facility, which the town

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## LEGAL ISSUES

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of Ledgeview denied, citing concerns about the farm's credibility due to past legal violations and refusal to allow inspections. The Livestock Facility Siting Review Board, which is a seven-member body that reviews appeals of local decisions on permit applications for new and expanded livestock facilities, affirmed the denial, and the Wisconsin Court of Appeals upheld this decision. The court concluded that a political subdivision could deny a permit application based on the applicant's lack of credibility, as evidenced by past violations and non-compliance with inspection requests.

**Clean Wisconsin, Inc. v. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (2021)**<sup>4</sup> — The Wisconsin Supreme Court addressed whether the DNR had explicit authority to impose conditions on Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for CAFOs. The court held that the DNR possesses broad authority to impose conditions on these permits to protect water quality, including setting animal unit maximums and off-site groundwater monitoring requirements.

**Recent developments in Polk County**<sup>5</sup> — In January 2025, a judge dismissed a lawsuit challenging the town of Eureka's ordinance regulating large livestock farms. The plaintiffs argued that the ordinance was unlawful and preempted by state regulations. The court dismissed the case, stating that the plaintiffs lacked standing as they were not directly affected by the ordinance.<sup>6</sup> This decision underscores the importance of demonstrating direct impact when challenging local regulations.

These cases highlight the evolving legal interpretations of local versus state authority in regulating livestock facilities and CAFOs in Wisconsin.

### ► Conclusion

Counties have limited but important roles in regulating livestock siting and CAFOs within Wisconsin's legal framework. While principles surrounding the preemption

of local regulation by state laws restrict the scope of local regulation, counties can act within their authority or seek state approval for stricter measures. Collaboration with DATCP and the DNR is essential to ensure that local efforts align with state objectives and achieve meaningful environmental protections.

Protecting groundwater from CAFO-related contamination requires a balanced approach that considers both agricultural interest and environmental health. By navigating the regulatory framework thoughtfully and collaboratively, counties can work towards safeguarding their vital groundwater resources.

For counties considering new regulations, careful planning, thorough documentation, and adherence to state requirements are critical. By working within these constraints, counties can protect local resources while navigating the complex regulatory environment surrounding livestock siting and CAFOs. If counties have specific questions about their authority to regulate CAFOs, they should contact their corporation counsel and may contact the authors of this article. ■

*Attolles Law, s.c. works on behalf of Wisconsin counties, school districts, and other public entities across the state of Wisconsin. Its president & CEO, Andy Phillips, has served as outside general counsel for the Wisconsin Counties Association for nearly 20 years.*

1. Adams v. State Livestock Facilities Siting Review Bd., 342 Wis. 444 ¶ 50, (2012).
2. Wis. Stat. 59.69(4) states in relevant part, "The board may not enact a development moratorium, as defined in s. 66.1002(1)(b), under this section or s. 59.03, by acting under ch. 236, or by acting under any other law, except that this prohibition does not limit any authority of the board to impose a moratorium that is not a development moratorium."
3. Town of Ledgeview v. Livestock Facility Siting Review Bd., 405 Wis. 2d 269 (Wis. App. 2022).
4. Clean Wisconsin, Inc. v. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 398 Wis. 2d 386 (2021).
5. Polk County Case #24CV209, Ben Binversie et. al. v. Town of Eureka.
6. Polk County Case # 24CV209 – the decision made by Judge Angeline Winton (Circuit Court Judge, Washburn County) was made on January 13, 2025, and the time to file an appeal had not expired at the time this article was written.





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